

FORUM WARE AGAIN

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Forum ware occupies an important, but anomalous place in the study of glazing in Europe: important because (mea culpa) it is accepted by many as the earliest medieval glazed pottery in the West; anomalous because the suggested date (c. 750-850) is too early for us to place it in the same general context as the earliest glazed wares of England and France (c. 900) and too late for us to see it as the end-product of a local Roman tradition. The purpose of this note is to present as quickly as possible information which suggests that Forum ware may be earlier than is generally supposed.

Background

The first major find of Forum ware was in the Lacus Iuturnae, a fountain of the second century B.C. in the Roman Forum. Here, in 1900, Giacomo Boni (1901:97-8) discovered 80 complete jugs, one broken jug and 1500 fragments of Forum ware, together with numerous other objects, when he removed the rubble which filled the basin (nel vuotare la vasca, Ibid.:89). Boni (Ibid.:60) associated the abandonment of the Lacus with the foundation of S. Maria Antiqua, 30 metres to the north, which he had just uncovered (Tea 1937:6). The paintings in the church included a portrait of pope Zacharias (741-52); the pottery from the abandoned fountain, therefore, was attributed to the eighth or ninth century (Wallis 1901:5; Ballardini 1964:143). Subsequently, R. B. K. Stevenson (1954:92) rejected this "high" chronology and suggested a date closer to the fourteenth century.

In the 1960s, the focus of attention moved from the Lacus Iuturnae to S. Cornelia, 15 kilometres north of Rome, which was excavated in 1963-5 by Charles Daniels for the British School at Rome (Ward-Perkins 1963:38). S. Cornelia is identified with confidence as part of Capracorum, a papal estate of the eighth and ninth centuries (Wickham 1978:172-9). The excavation revealed three periods of occupation, with Forum ware present in all of them. Period 1 was believed to have ended c. 780 and period 2 in the ninth century; period 3 began some time after c. 1000. The Forum ware from period 3 was thought to be residual; hence the suggested floruit, c. 750-850 (Whitehouse 1969:52-3; Idem 1978:481).

The final report on the pottery from S. Cornelia is now in the press (Whitehouse 1980). Although we have refined the chronology (period 1 probably ended and period 2 probably began in 774-6, while period 3 began in 1026-35), the suggested dating of Forum ware stands.

Meanwhile, the high chronology came under attack by the Roman ceramologo, Otto Mazzucato (1968:153-5; 1972:61), who insisted on the similarity between forms used for Forum ware and for twelfth to thirteenth century 'Ceramica laziale'; he also pointed out the uncertainty of the provenance of pots allegedly from the Lacus (Idem 1972:10-12). As a result, two opinions on the date of Forum ware are current: (1) that it is early, cp. Potter (1979:147), who states that at S. Rufina, another site near Rome, "Forum ware vessels were sealed by a mosaic floor dated on stylistic grounds to about A.D. 750"; (2) that it is later, cp. Marinone Cardinale (1979:251), who states that at Isola Sacra sherds were recovered from units which are demonstrably later than the eighth or ninth century.

Coins from the Lacus Iuturnae

It may seem foolish to reconsider the date of Forum ware by returning to the Lacus, an old excavation, the records of which are inadequate. However, new evidence for the date of the filling is now available. The evidence consists of coins. The Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma possesses more than 1400 bronze coins from Boni's excavation. Thirty years ago, Dr I. Dondero (1952:8) identified 110 of the coins; all were Constantinian or later, down to the beginning of the fifth century. In 1979-80, Dr Richard Reece cleaned and identified the remaining pieces. His identifications are as follows:

1	Augustus
4	1st-2nd century
1	Caracalla
1	Philip I
2	Gallienus
1	Aurelian
1	Barbarous radiate
2	Radiates
3	Constantine I
80	House of Constantine, 330-48
2	Magnentius
406	House of Constantine, 350-60
10	Julian
160	House of Valentinian
59	House of Theodosius
1	Athalaric, 526-34
1	Justin II(?), 565-78
<u>575</u>	3rd-4th century illegible
1310	

Dr Reece comments: "none of the legible coins is later than 578 and from the module and general appearance of the illegible pieces there is no reason to expect any to be later than c. 600".

Unfortunately, we have no information about find-spots. Nevertheless, since there is no coin later than c. 600 from the site as a whole, there can be no coin later than this from the feature which concerns us here: the basin.

S. Maria Antiqua

Boni, followed by Eva Tea (1937:49-54), supposed that the Lacus Iuturnae, which had been the centre of a pagan cult of healing, was abandoned when an adjacent part of the Imperial palace was converted into the church of S. Maria Antiqua. The hypothesis is attractive. If it is correct, what does S. Maria Antiqua tell us about the filling of the Lacus?

We do not know when the church was founded. Per Jonas Nordhagen (1962) describes six periods of mural decoration between the fourth or fifth century and the pontificate of John VII (705-7). The earliest trace of large-scale decoration belongs to Nordhagen's layer 4. This is demonstrably earlier than layer 5, which by common consent is dated to the pontificate of Martin I (649-55). Layer 4 is either contemporary with, or later than, a radical remodelling of the church. The latter included the insertion of columns and beneath one of the bases was a coin of Justin II (565-78) (Tea 1937:41 and 362). Because of the coin, Tea attributed the transformation of the church to the Narses, who left Rome in 567. In any case, it is earlier—perhaps a few decades earlier (cp. Kitzinger 1977:113)—than the paintings of Martin I.

Grounds exist, therefore, for suspecting that both the abandonment of the Lacus and the transformation of the church took place after 565. We know that the latter was accomplished before 649-55. If the two events were contemporary, the basin of the Lacus was backfilled within a generation of c. 600, by which time Forum ware was already in use.

Other sites

If our hypothesis is correct, the Forum ware from period 2 at S. Cornelia was residual; is this possible? The answer is: yes. Period 1 may be an amalgam of several phases of land-use, the Liber Pontificalis records that Hadrian I created the estate in 774-6 by merging existing properties (Duchesne 1886:501) and the site yielded undoubted late Roman pottery, such as African red slip ware and sherds of amphorae. Thus, the 25 sherds of Forum ware from periods 1 and 2 could have been residual, like the 11 sherds from period 3. Forum ware has been found in at least four other excavations in Lazio: at Mazzano Romano (Potter 1972:144), Isola Sacra (Marinone Cardinale 1979), S. Rufina (Potter 1979:147) and Anguillara (Whitehouse 1979:265). Three of the sites—Isola Sacra, S. Rufina and Anguillara—were occupied in both the Roman and the medieval periods. Potter reports that some of the Forum ware from S. Rufina is earlier than c. 750 and it is possible that the sherds from Isola Sacra (scraps from the filling of graves) and Anguillara (scraps from the make-up for the floor of the church) are residual. In other words, if we knew that Forum ware was in use c. 600, we would have little difficulty in dismissing as residual sherds from later deposits at the five sites listed above.

Conclusion

Until recently, two opinions existed on the date of Forum ware: (1) that it belongs to the period c. 750-850 and (2) that it is later. S. Cornelia shows that the low chronology was mistaken. The coins from the Lacus now suggest that the high chronology, too, may be wrong and that Forum ware came into use some time before c. 600.

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Depuis sa découverte, il y a vingt ans environ, la datation de la poterie 'Forum' a été le sujet de nombreuses controverses. Il a généralement été accepté qu'elle datait du VIII^e ou IX^e siècle, bien que certains spécialistes préfèrent une datation plus tardive. Des tessons de type 'Forum' ont été identifiés, pour la première fois, dans la fontaine LACUS IUTURNAE à Rome; le nettoyage récent de nombreuses pièces de monnaie provenant de cette fontaine, et leur identification a produit une nouvelle datation pour cette poterie vernissée. La pièce de monnaie la plus récente de la collection est une émission de Justin II datant de 560 après J. C. Est-il donc possible que 'Forum' date de la fin du VI^e ou du début du VII^e siècle? En ré-examinant les endroits où ce genre de poterie a été trouvé en Etrurie du sud, il apparaît clairement que, mélangée à cette dernière, on trouve de la poterie datant de la fin de l'époque romaine, mais que ces tessons romains sont considérés comme étant des vestiges qui se trouvent par hasard dans des couches médiévales. Par conséquent, on peut appliquer le même raisonnement dans le cas de 'Forum' et conclure que que cette poterie remonte à une date antérieure à celle que j' ai proposée dans les papiers précédents que j' ai écrits à ce sujet.

Seit der Anerkennung des Forum-Geschirrs vor fast zwanzig Jahren hat es sehr viele Debatten über die Datierung dieses Geschirrs gegeben. Es wird im allgemeinen angenommen, das dieses Geschirr entweder vom achten oder neunten Jahrhunderte stammt, obwohl einige Gelehrten einen späteren mittelalterlichen Horizont bevorzugen.

Scherben des Forum-Geschirrs wurden zuerst in dem Becken des LACUS IUTURNAE in Rom identifiziert; die neuliche Reinigung der zahlreichen Münzen aus diesem Brunnen und ihre nachherige Identifizierung hatte eine neue Datierung dieses glasierten Geschirrs hervorgebracht. Die spateste Munze in dieser Kollektion ist eine Emission von ± 560 A. D. . Ist es deswegen möglich, dass das Forum-Geschirr entweder am Ende des sechsten oder am Anfang des siebten Jahrhundert produziert wurde? Nach Wiederprüfung der Fundstellen in Süd-Etrurien ist es klar, dass spätrömisches Geschirr auch vorhanden war, aber dass diese für restliche Scherben in mittelalterlichen Horizonten gelten.

Daher gibt es gewichtige Gründe für die Betrachtung des Forum-Geschirrs als gleichfalls restliche Scherben und von ziemlich fruherer Datierung als sogar ich selbst in vorhergehenden Aufsätzen zu diesem Thema vorschlug.